

Online Distance Education and Embedded Librarianship Integration

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INTRODUCTION

As the landscape of colleges and universities continues to change by focusing more on online distance education, collaborative learning, and students' information literacy, so too must the curriculum and strategies employed to adapt to the changing pace of education. This article presents embedded librarianship as not only a resource for mobilizing innovation, but a vehicle for expanding and evolving the collaborative relationships that exist to support students, faculty, and institutional strategic goals. To best explore the ways colleges and universities can most effectively incorporate embedded librarianship models, this article begins by creating a foundation that represents the various activities, levels, and forms of embedment previously used by various higher education institutions. Next, the article continues by describing an example of embedded librarianship in the case of Ball State University in Muncie, IN, and poses suggestions for potential movement toward increased academic, administrative, and institutional collaboration. The article then moves to discuss the trends and issues related to collaboration with embedded librarians in online distance education in the form of course management systems (CMS) and learning management systems (LMS). Finally, the article concludes with questions for future research and a look at the ideal future of librarianship with practical recommendations for colleges and universities as they move toward more integrative models.

BACKGROUND

While the archetypal view of the traditional librarian often evokes images of a person standing behind a large reference desk waiting for someone to approach the designated area, the embedded librarian is far from this portrait. While Holley (1985) describes librarianship as a profession that requires an understanding of higher education history and development, an appreciation for scholarship and learning, a working knowledge of knowledge acquisition, and an ability to decipher and evaluate research findings, Meijer (1982) defines librarianship as

a form of cultural enterprise whose main characteristic is the stimulation of the optimum use of mankind's cultural heritage insofar as it consists of coded thoughts recorded in documents that are and must be held in readiness for use with the ultimate objective of making possible cultural progress ... in its particular sphere. (p. 26)

Holley and Meijer frame the conversation about embedded librarianship, which includes a host of requirements, abilities, and values. As Shumaker (2012) explains, embedded librarians are "on-call experts who can apply their expertise on demand to meet the information needs of any and all clients" (p. 4). Rooted in the concept of integration and collaboration, embedded librarianship

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... moves the librarians out of libraries and creates a new model of library and information work. It emphasizes the importance of forming a strong working relationship between the librarian and a group or team of people who need the librarian's information expertise. (p. 4)

Though embedded librarianship derives its roots from Barbara Dewey's (2005) metaphor of embedded journalists who attached themselves to the military throughout the Iraq War, today's embedded librarians find themselves attached to many facets of the university, engaged in numerous activities, while operating at various levels and using different forms of embedment.

Embedded Librarian Activities

As a general service to the entire student community, librarians offer one-on-one reference advice and instruction, one-shot instruction within courses, information literacy credit courses, and instructional material and resources posted on university websites (Burke & Tumbleson, 2011). However, within the scope of embedded librarianship, librarians engage in infinite numbers of activities and find themselves instructing students in their research projects for class (Bartnik, 2007; Bennett & Simning, 2010), assisting faculty in their own research endeavors (Bartnik, 2007), collaborating with faculty on course development (Bowler & Street, 2008), working within academic colleges and departments as research assistants (Bartnik, 2007), and creating e-learning instructional materials and tutorials (Schulte, 2012). Additionally, embedded librarians' day-to-day activities include meeting with students and faculty to discuss their needs, providing training to a range of audiences, attending campus meetings to learn more about the needs of the community, and communicating via web-based work spaces (Dewey, 2005; Galston, Huber, Johnson, & Long, 2012; Shumaker & Talley, 2009). Truly, through embedded librarianship activities, students, faculty, and administrators within the collegiate community have reason to view librarians as more than individuals confined to one designated space on campus.

Levels of Embedment

In the face-to-face realm of embedded librarianship, faculty use varying levels of embedment in their courses (Bowler & Street, 2008). These levels include entry

level, twin-pack, immersion, co-teaching with the librarian identified as a specialist, and co-teaching without the librarian identified as a specialist. At the entry level of embedment, a librarian collaborates on assignment development, does not assist with grading, and facilitates one information literacy research session. As with the entry level of embedment, the twin-pack level includes the same activities, except in this level, the librarian facilitates two information literacy sessions directly linked to the information literacy-related assignments in the course. At the immersion level, the librarian works within student teams to assist with problem-based learning assignments and meets with the teams to help students develop research strategies and critically analyze sources. In the co-teaching level of embedment, the librarian fully co-teaches the course, is jointly responsible for the course design, assignments, grading, preparation, and delivery. At the co-teaching level, a faculty member may choose whether or not to inform students of the librarian's expertise as a specialist. In their study of the varying levels of embedment, Bowler and Street found undergraduate students' information literacy increased most in the co-taught, identified specialist scenario. This example speaks to efficaciousness of embedded librarian presence through a collaborative model.

Forms of Online Embedded Librarianship

Outside of the realm of face-to-face classroom interaction, in which faculty may also choose to incorporate librarians at varying levels, embedded librarians work within the virtual space as reference faculty, co-collaborators, research aids, and reference experts (Bennett & Simning, 2010; Hoffman, 2010; Kesselman & Watstein, 2009; York & Vance, 2009). Faculty accommodate online learners' needs through course and learning management systems like Blackboard and Moodle by incorporating embedded librarians in one of two major ways: at the macro or micro level (Bennett & Simning, 2010). At the macro level, embedded librarianship occurs in the form of links and guides within the medium for students to access information when needed. At the micro level, embedded librarianship occurs directly within the online course so students may interact with librarians and gain immediacy in receiving responses to research inquiries. In her mixed-methods study of embedded librarians'

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